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ABSTRACT

Recent trends and developments related to the structures of qualification levels in Germany, Spain, France, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom were examined in a quasi-experimental study that was part of a more comprehensive study on the same topic. The study focused on standards, qualifications, and classifications at the tertiary level of the German educational system and the categorization of qualifications at the tertiary level in England, France, the Netherlands, and Spain. The study documented that the discussion of how to ensure the transparency of qualifications and their adequate categorization in all-embracing classification systems at the national and transnational levels is increasing throughout the European Union. Different countries are taking different routes to improving the transparency and comparability of qualifications in higher education. At the tertiary level, German considerations and concepts show an increasing trend toward outcome-based standards. The same also applies to England, France, and the Netherlands. In Spain, the national classification system is currently in the introductory phase, with efforts currently concentrated on vocational qualifications at the secondary level. (The bibliography lists 28 references. The following items are appended: (1) the Sorbonne Declaration; (2) the

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Bologna Declaration; and (3) the 1997 Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region.) (MN)

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European Structures of Qualification Levels

Reports on recent developments in Germany, Spain, France, The Netherlands and in the United Kingdom (England & Wales)

Volume 3

Günter Heitmann

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Contents Page

Foreword 3

1. Preliminary remarks 5
2. Standards, qualifications and classifications at the tertiary level of the German education system 10
3. The categorisation of qualifications at tertiary level in England, France, the Netherlands and Spain 22
   - 3.1 England and Wales 23
   - 3.2 France 26
   - 3.3 The Netherlands 27
   - 3.4 Spain 29
4. Conclusions and prospects 30

Bibliography 33

Annexes 35

Foreword

This exploratory study is a quasi by-product of a more comprehensive study commissioned by Cedefop/Thessaloníki on recent developments in the countries mentioned above in the area of qualification structures for education and vocational training. A number of things have changed in higher education in the last few decades, moving towards a stronger vocational orientation with a certain move away from the academic orientation still predominant today in the universities and scientific institutions of higher education (Fachhochschulen). Higher education institutions or corresponding educational establishments have emerged recently in most countries which, on the one hand compete with the traditional vocational training below higher education but on the other also with the scientific higher education institutions insofar as the latter also increasingly train people for the private business sector and increasingly less so for the public service sector or for the so-called independent professions (doctors, teachers, lawyers, etc.), where the employment prospects and particularly the earning possibilities are limited in the face of ever tighter public spending budgets and as a result of the trend towards privatisation.

This has led and is still continuing to lead to ever more sharply marked differentiation and decentralisation in the countries investigated here with regard to qualification levels and branches of study. On the other hand there are signs here and there on the continent of a certain alignment with American and English structures. Here the first level of higher education has already been less academically than vocationally orientated and there were only the rudiments of a formal vocational training below the higher education level.

Is vocational training at secondary level II and at the interface to higher education only becoming more successful due to pressure from above? What solutions remain open to it in the course of the general increase in qualification requirements? Will it become further differentiated or regionalised or, in the course of the evaluation it currently appears to be undergoing, will it become further integrated in order to compete with the (colleges) of higher education? What gateways and back-door and unconventional entry points remain for its graduates in the context of their further training at higher education level? Can this remain closed to them permanently? These questions may however be somewhat in the background in the present analysis, but they are being asked all the more in the specific context of the Member States being investigated. Looking further afield as to how other Member States deal with this, in order to meet the specifically systemic challenges in each case, as well as those of European comparability and transparency, allows important lessons to be learnt for own decision-making in policy and practice. The forum set up jointly by the EU Commission and Cedefop on the transparency of qualifications is to examine this report and the expected recommendations with great care, particularly as the trends described here will have considerable repercussions on vocational training and lifelong further education.

Why are higher education institutions able to solve their problems of qualification recognition in an international context largely autonomously, while the technical and vocational

institutions and recognised vocational training routes or corresponding middle and advanced vocational qualification awarders find it so difficult to do so. Is this due to their limited autonomy, problems with finding a solution themselves or is the problem of transparency and recognition less difficult for them because they are less committed?

Questions of international comparability and transparency of qualifications are very much to the fore. To establish these, do we need a (meta) structure of the training or qualification levels incorporating and clarifying these trends? If so, what could or should such a structure look like or how would it look in outline? We are awaiting the first answers to this last question from the comparative analysis of the reports produced by the countries, which refers mainly to vocational training below the higher education level. In its most important results, the part study presented here deals with an overall analysis and corresponding conclusions and recommendations. It seems to us to be so interesting however that we also want to publish it as an original work of the author, who for decades has been involved both with questions concerning the development of German technical universities and higher education institutions as well as with European comparative studies, in particular in the area of training for engineers, and has also been involved in the Cedefop network on trends in vocational and qualification development.

Burkart Sellin, Project Coordinator, Cedefop/Thessaloniki

1. Preliminary remarks

A growing number of people receive their first, and often their second, vocational qualification or vocational further education in the tertiary sector of the education system. In different ways, this sector has been developed in almost all the EU Member States for years. In many countries the number of young people who receive a vocational training at higher education level has risen in the meantime to over 50 % of a given age group. They are distributed among the various levels of education as can be seen from the OECD table shown below for a number of countries (1) in 1996:

Table 1: Proportion of graduates in the corresponding age-group in selected OECD member states in 1996 (in %)

	Non-university tertiary programmes	Short first university degree programmes	Long first university degree programmes	Second university degree programmes	PhD or equivalent
Norway	50	22	6	9	1
USA	22	35	[illegible]	12	1
Japan	30	23	-	2	0
United Kingdom	12	34	[illegible]	12	1
Finland	19	11	13	-	2
Ireland	16	14	11	04	1
Spain	2	11	15	-	1
Switzerland	26	[illegible]	09	0-	3
Germany	11	-	16	-	2
Sweden	04	11	08	03	2

(1) OECD (1998): *Education at a Glance*, OECD Indicators, Paris, p. 200.

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The development of higher education is connected with further differentiation, the creation of new types of educational establishment, the extension and reorganisation of existing facilities and the revaluation of higher secondary education establishments. The separation of the tertiary and secondary level, but also the individual types of education, levels and qualifications, are meanwhile often not compatible internationally. This is particularly true for training and vocations taken up as an extension to the university studies currently available, a trend which is occasionally described as the academisation or tertiarisation of vocational training ([2]). Often it has led to the development of a so-called non-university sector, whose development programme is not always clearly distinguishable from individual courses on offer at the secondary education level. This is evident not least from efforts to include the tertiary level in classification systems for vocational qualifications and to enable a clear ranking to the appropriate levels. Systems such as the *International Standard Classification of Education* (ISCED) in its most recent 1997 version and the 1985 European 5-level system, and a number of recent national systems such as those in England and in the Netherlands provide for level 5. Shorter training courses in the tertiary sector below the so-called *degree-levels* should, however, be assigned rather to level 4. ISCED 1997 also provides for a level 6 for research-related qualifications in the narrower sense.

For individual vocational groups, for engineers for example, looking at international recognition and the appropriate classification of the qualifications obtained or connected with a particular course of study, there has been long discussion on the question of whether the classification system with its level 5 should not be differentiated further, e.g. should be extended by an additional level, between the 1st and 2nd vocationally-related leaving examinations at higher education level (Bachelor and Master) or whether theoretically-orientated and applications-related qualifications would create a clearer distinction.

Similar attempts and solutions relating to the whole tertiary level of the education system can be seen in the latest statements made by European Ministers of Education and Science, which in 1998, with the Sorbonne Declaration (see Annex 1), and in June 1999, with the so-called Bologna Declaration (see Annex 2), signed by representatives from 28 European countries, called for the creation of a standard European reference structure for higher education. This provides for a distinction between three levels:

a) the *first degree level,* with the acquisition of a first degree after at least three years of study;

b) the *post-graduate level,* with the acquisition of a further degree after a maximum of a further 2 years, therefore a total of at least 5 years of study; and

c) the *doctorate level,* with the acquisition of a doctorate after a total of at least 8 years of study ([3]). Some countries also see a differentiation of a so-called *sub-degree level*, which

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([2]) Teichler, U. (1999): *Studieren bald 50% eines Geburtsjahrgangs?* in: Hochschulwesen 4/99, p. 114-119.

([3]) Joint declaration on the harmonisation of the architecture of the European higher education system by the four Ministers in charge for France, Germany, Italy and the United Kingdom, Paris, the Sorbonne,

consists of short training courses in the higher education sector lasting 1 to a maximum of 2 years. It is debatable however in this connection whether with a sub-degree level of this kind an additional level would have to be incorporated into the classification systems or whether this level is not adequately covered by level 4 of the ISCED of 1997 or of the European 5-level system or also individual national classification systems (e.g. England, the Netherlands). In the meantime, level 5 stipulates a minimum of three years' higher education and the accompanying knowledge, skills and competences acquired ([4]).

As a result of the Dearing Report, under the overall control of the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA), considerable efforts are being made, in view of the increasing lack of transparency and lack of comparability of courses and qualifications on offer, to develop a suitable classification structure, a "National Qualifications Framework (NQF)" for the tertiary education sector and to categorise qualifications suitably within that framework ([5]) ([6]).

Outside Europe, Australia already has a national *Qualification Framework* along these lines. New Zealand has similarly set up a *Framework (QF)* of this kind. "The New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) oversees the operation of the Qualification Framework (QF), through which all qualifications are authorised and recognised. Based on an 8-level scale, all qualifications are registered in terms of *unit standards* which are intended to define the specific outcomes realised or competences developed through the course module" ([7]).

The disagreements which regularly arise in the meantime with the more or less autonomous (traditional) universities do however pose the question of how suitable concepts of an educational and occupation-related classification arranged according to uniform criteria of the definition of levels and standards are for recording vocational qualifications at all levels and in all fields, including all university qualifications accurately and usable for different purposes, as has been attempted to some extent in England and started in the Netherlands.

The problem of adequate classification and transparency of the competences gained and the reciprocal recognition of qualifications is an important one for university qualifications and training programmes particularly in view of the international mobility of students and graduates and the protection of freedom of movement and settlement in the context of the European Union (EU). This is starting from the assumption that graduates of vocational training courses of the tertiary level, as holders of qualifications of levels 2 and 3, will

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25 May 1998.

([4]) *The European higher education area*, Joint declaration of the European Ministers of Education; convened in Bologna, 19 June 1999.

([5]) QAA, The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (1998): *The way ahead*, in: higher quality, Bulletin of the QAA, 4 October 1998.

([6]) QAA, The Quality Assurance Agency (1999): *A consultative paper on Higher Education Qualifications Frameworks for England, Wales and Northern Ireland (EWNI), and for Scotland.*

([7]) OECD (1998): *Redefining Tertiary Education*, Paris.

increasingly make more use of their opportunities for international mobility and freedom to settle within the EU in order to gain employment advantages in the labour market. t university level, the preference has been to secure international recognition of qualifications by means of agreements between individual countries as well as with the EU directives on individual professions which require a university education, and with the General Directive 89/48/EEC of 21.12.1988 and with conventions at Council of Europe and UNESCO level ([8]).

The *Lisbon Convention* is the most recent comprehensive initiative (see Annex 3), a joint convention signed on 11.4.1997 in Lisbon by the Council of Europe and UNESCO/European Region on the recognition of qualifications both for access to higher education and higher education itself or some of its parts[9] (9). It does not concentrate on differentiation into levels but on an increased transparency of the training programmes and examinations by many means and on the laying down of principles for reciprocal recognition.

The question of reciprocal recognition in the academic and vocational sphere would doubtless be made considerably easier if some agreement could be reached on the common reference structures on such instruments and principles including the accompanying levels and educational standards. The attempts made at EU level at qualification classification and comparison ([10]) (10) for vocational qualifications at secondary level and the experience acquired as a result of this could constitute an important starting point for this ([11]) (11). This is also true in particular for explaining the necessity for, description of and classification of qualifications at the interface between secondary and tertiary vocational training.

National and transnational classification systems and the determining of criteria on the classification and the individual levels are also very important to the current debate on the setting up of national and EU-wide accreditation procedures and courses of study and the standards to be applied.

In the meantime, classification systems for qualifications can only offer relatively general orientations and can hardly be differentiated in such a way that they can meet the multiple requirements of reciprocal recognition and transnational transparency for academic, professional and labour market-orientated purposes. It appears to be necessary to supplement classification systems with suitable specifications according to requirements to be met. Work is currently being carried out on appropriate instruments and procedures and their

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([8]) BMBF, Federal Ministry for Education, Science, Research and Technology (1996): *Äquivalenzen im Hochschulbereich*, Bonn.

([9]) Council of Europe/UNESCO (1997): *Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning higher education in the European region*, Lisbon, 11 April 1997, for details: Explanatory report to the convention.

([10]) Cedefop-Panorama (1993): *Systeme und Verfahren der Zertifizierung von Qualifikationen in der Europäischen Gemeinschaft*, Thessaloniki, July 1993.

([11]) Sellin, B. (1996): *Do joint European vocational training standards stand a chance?* Discussion paper in Cedefop-Panorama, February 1996.

implementation for the tertiary level of the education system in Europe. They are primarily directed at giving substantial information about the knowledge, skills and competences actually acquired with the individual qualifications and how they can be assessed in a vocational or work-related context. In addition to the procedures already mentioned for an accreditation of training programmes for certain qualification levels orientated more strongly towards outcomes, the main measures are as follows:

Introduction of a European *diploma supplement* ([12]);

Introduction of modularisation, components and/or *credit point* systems, in particular as part of a Europe-wide introduction of the *European Credit Transfer System* (ECTS), which was recently extended to become a transfer and accumulation system (EuroCATS);

Development of the validation, certification and recognition of knowledge, skills and competences which have been acquired on the basis of informal or non-formal learning *(prior, experimental and non- or informal learning)* ([13]);

Europe-wide introduction of quality assurance systems and in this connection in particular of internal and external methods for evaluating the quality of study programmes, the results of which are published ([14]).

In addition to this, the development of European databases and information networks is considered to be necessary and is being driven forward in order to keep the information on qualifications, generated in various ways and partly classified, easily and readily available for anyone who may be interested.

Taking the German situation and the current discussions as an example, the problems of the classification and ranking of the degrees as well as of the development, implementation and safeguarding of standards for qualifications at tertiary level should be explained. They are described following the structure and questions laid down in the context of the CIRETOQ/CINOP project *Qualification levels revisited* on the description and analysis of the standards and levels of basic vocational training in the national systems of England, France, Germany, the Netherlands and Spain. In a further section, the awareness of problems and the various attempts at solutions in these countries are compared briefly with the situation in Germany, and finally a number of conclusions are drawn.

([12]) Description of the vocational and activity profile connected with the diploma.

([13]) Bjornavold, J. (1998): *Assessment of non-formal learning: the quality and limitations of methodologies*: Vocational Training No 12, European Journal, 1998.

([14]) van den Berghe, W. (1998): *Indikatoren aus verschiedenen Perspektiven*, The use of quality indicators in vocational training and education, Cedefop document, 1st edition, Thessaloniki, 1998.

2. Standards, qualifications and classifications at the tertiary level of the German education system

Structure and classifications of the tertiary sector

Unlike in most of the other countries of the EU, in Germany there is no uniform classification system which encompasses all types of education and training. Attempts at training or activity-related classifications and the accompanying definition of standards are directed at individual levels, branches or vocational areas. Attempts at classifying degrees or other qualifications which can be obtained at the tertiary level of the education system relate both to the university tertiary sector regulated by the higher education framework law and the higher education laws of the 16 Federal Länder, as well as to the comparatively small non-university tertiary sector only developed in a number of Federal Länder, represented by vocational colleges and similar institutions which are governed by Land laws. Vocational degrees in the higher education and university tertiary sector, which in Germany as well as the universities, technical universities and other specialised institutions of higher education includes the recently increasingly important colleges of higher education (Fachhochschulen), are *Diplom* and Masters degrees as well as the degrees of so-called first State examinations (in teaching, law, medicine and pharmacy).

The classification attempts have hitherto not been based on uniform criteria of a definition of standards or levels, but are fundamentally training-orientated. They allow conclusions to be drawn on the general or vocational knowledge and competences acquired with certain degrees. It transpires that there are considerable differences between individual degrees and branches of study.

The relationship to the science or profession on the one hand or the relationship to the vocation on the other can be regarded as a distinctive feature for classification, comparable to the classifications according to 5A or 5B of ISCED 1997. Master's degrees generally show the smallest vocational relationship. The vocational relationship of the *Diplom* degrees is generally expressed in the vocational title given to it, e.g. Diplom-Ingenieur (Dipl.-Ing.), a qualified engineer, which still says nothing about the holder's subject speciality. Rather this can be deduced from colloquial titles such as civil engineer or electrical engineer. Diplom degrees are awarded in some sectors after 4-5 years of intensive theoretically-orientated university studies, as well as after 3-4 years of intensive vocationally-orientated courses of study at colleges of higher education or at polytechnics (in a shorter course).

The different orientation is indicated in courses at colleges of higher education (Fachhochschulen) by the abbreviation FH. According to requirement, they should show rather a criterion based on content and a certain qualification profile, not a particular additional level within the higher education sector. As regards working in the public service sector, the two Diplom degrees are currently still linked however with different entry and

occupation levels. This shows that the training-orientated levels laid down do not necessarily correspond to levels and classifications in employment organisations, industrial hierarchies or even pay agreements.

All degrees are developed autonomously by the institutions of higher education, but are then based on State-approved examination regulations. They are supplemented by rules on studies and chronologically arranged courses of study, in which the type and extent of the subjects or modules to graduate in, the results to be obtained and ever more frequently also the credits to be obtained are detailed. As these rules have to be adjusted as flexibly as possible to new conditions and are therefore amended more frequently than examination regulations, in most Federal Länder they are not subject to State approval but are decided upon and implemented directly by the institutions of higher education. In training courses examined by the first State examination these rules are based on State regulations, which are broadly based on specific legal regulations, e.g. the teacher training laws of the individual Federal Länder, 16 in all.

Since the most recent amendment of the higher education framework law of 20 August 1998, both universities and colleges of higher education can now award Bachelor and Masters degrees in addition to the degrees already mentioned (14). By the winter semester of 1999/2000, well over 300 such courses had already been developed and approximately 240 of them had already received State approval and had been included in the list of courses available ([15]) (15). With this comes a greater, subdivision into levels, initially predominantly linked with the length of the course of study. After the first level with the Bachelor degree after 3 or 4 years of study comes a second level with the further Masters degree which can be obtained with a further one to two years of study. Both the first and the second level should preferably lead to a degree qualifying the student for a vocation. Both together should not require more than 5 years' study. A third level in the tertiary sector, corresponding to level 6 of ISCED 1997, would then be formed by the Doctorate degree, which can only be awarded by universities and institutions of similar standing, and the post-doctoral qualifications (for lecturing at universities) still currently common in Germany.

The horizontal differentiation by branches of study and in particular by study areas is increasingly diverse and not so bindingly laid down as in the recognised occupations that require training in the dual system. A combined decision was reached for the colleges of higher education (Fachhochschulen) in an *agreement of the Länder Conference of Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs concerning branches of study and Diplom degrees at Fachhochschulen,* first on 14.10.1980 regarding the branches of study on offer and the possible degrees and in the meantime updated on a number of occasions for the further 11 branches in the list ([16]) (16).

([15]) Framework law on higher education (Hochschulrahmengesetz, HRG), in the version of 20 August 1998, Section 19.

([16]) Conference of Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs (KMK) (1996), *Vereinbarung der Kultusministerkonferenz zu Fachrichtungen, Studiengänge und Diplomgrade an Fachhochschulen.* Bonn,

In the non-university tertiary sector, represented by the vocational colleges (Berufsakademien), after a three-year training period alternating between college and job, both *Diplom* degrees and other degrees qualifying the student for a vocation are awarded, in each case with the designated letters (BA): e.g. *Diplom* Engineer (BA) or Engineer (BA). 6 of the 16 Federal Länder have so far set up vocational colleges. 4 of these (Baden-Württemberg, Berlin, Saxony and Thuringia) award *Diplom* degrees. The *Diplom* degrees have been given a status equal to that of the diplomas from colleges of higher education by a decision of the Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs (KMK). They therefore also fall under the general EU directive on recognised degrees from colleges of higher education (89/48/EEC) as well as under ISCED level 5B. This does not apply for a number of other vocational college degrees such as in the Länder of Schleswig-Holstein and Lower Saxony, which in a three-year training course often have a practical component of more than 50% and were not ranked at the same level by the Conference of Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs.

This is even less true for the *Assistent* degrees, classed under level 4 of ISCED, occasionally awarded in the course of these *dual* training courses in the tertiary sector after two years of training. The majority of the degrees from technical colleges (e.g. schools for master craftsmen/craftswomen and schools for technicians) and the health service schools, which are responsible for the training of the non-university health professions are ascribed to level 4, as also happened in a comparative study by the German Statistical Office in 1997 ([17]) (17). This sector of the non-medical health professions has already been integrated in part into the university training sector and there it leads to degrees which belong to level 5.

History of system differentiations and classification attempts in the context of vocational training and further training at tertiary level

Only at the beginning of the 1970s and as a result of the rapidly expanding numbers of people entitled to go into higher education could an increased differentiation be established within the tertiary level of the education system. Apart from through the founding of new universities and the creation of polytechnics, this came about primarily by removing the so-called higher technical colleges from the vocational education system and reorganising and further developing them into colleges of higher education, which started at the beginning of the 1970s. At the same time, with the setting up of colleges of further education (*Fachoberschulen*), after a total time at school of 12 years, a new qualification allowing access to the tertiary sector was created, the *Fachhochschulreife*, which made students eligible to study at a *Fachhochschule* (college of higher education).

Decision of the KMK of 20 October 1996.

([17]) Jahn, Heidrun (2000), *Bachelor und Master in der Erprobungsphase*, appeared in the series: Arbeitsberichte des Instituts für Hochschulforschung Wittenberg an der Martin-Luther-Universität, Halle-Wittenberg, No 1/2000.

The classification criterion which appeared to be appropriate at the beginning of the differentiation was the formal criterion of the length of study (3 years for colleges of higher education, 5 years for universities) and therefore implicitly one involving different levels. Parallel to this, a stronger content classification was established in the higher education laws of the 1970s on the basis of the criteria of a practical and applied relationship on the one hand and a theoretical and research relationship on the other. It should, among other things, be reflected in different names, e.g. "graduate engineer, Ing. (grad)" of the colleges of higher education versus "*Diplom* engineer, Dipl.-Ing." of the universities and technical universities.

These attempts at creating a relatively uniform and simple classification system did not stand up to the realities of vocational practice or to the different interests and influences of higher education and vocational policy. The period of time within which a student should complete his studies as the criterion upon which to base decisions on levels could not be used because that of the Fachhochschulen was extended from 3 to generally 4 years, by integrating practical semesters, and that of the universities, at least nominally ([18]), was reduced to 4 to 4.5 years. The names of the degrees were established in the branches of study represented in each case at universities and Fachhochschulen uniformly by the title *Diplom*. The Masters degree continues to be reserved for the universities, as corresponding courses, predominantly in the humanities, do not exist in the Fachhochschulen. The distinction between applied and research courses became partly relative as the Fachhochschulen received the right to carry out applied research, and through research commissions from industry and private businesses the universities turned to more applications-related activities. In addition to this, less than 20 % of university graduates are employed in research-related occupations in the narrower sense of the word. There remain the qualification profiles of the degrees and of the graduates who and which, in the face of growing competition between the colleges, are developing and becoming more vocationally or scientifically orientated. They can still be classified to some extent by the less precisely differentiated ISCED system. With reference to the labour market, and in particular to the job creation system and the ever changing working processes and their requirements, the difference between a practical orientation (= Fachhochschulen) and a theoretical orientation (= universities) is no longer a meaningful classification. The associated standards of the degrees obtained are far less easily distinguishable than they were in past years.

It is not yet clear whether, with the introduction of Bachelor and Masters degrees now being driven forward in addition to the increased internationalisation of the training programmes and degrees, this will also be followed by the replacement of the present binary system of foundation courses with a system of clearly distinguishable levels, and whether this will succeed. While the German Conference of Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs (KMK) still stresses the experimental and complementary nature of the new qualifications and wants to make their longer-term retention and acceptance dependent on a minimum 5-year

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([18]) Due to the organisation of studies in institutions of higher education, this is however generally extended to at least 5 years.

trial period and corresponding results, the German Science Council in a current report favours the medium-term replacement of the present binary structure and the system of *Diplom* degrees with the successive Bachelor-Masters structure because it considers the parallel running of the old and new systems neither sensible nor financeable ([19]).

It also remains unclear whether, with the accreditation of courses of study first introduced in this connection, more vocationally relevant qualifications and those described in the form of outcomes will be successful. The latter could form the starting points for classifications with a greater differentiation in terms of content, but at least for differentiating supplements to existing classification systems such as ISCED. First of all, there should however only be accreditations for the new courses of study leading to the Bachelor and Masters degrees[20]. The national accreditation board formed in the meantime will authorise subject-related or regional agencies suitable for carrying out the actual task of accreditation, and has already started setting them up. For the first time, in addition to representatives of the Bund, Länder and institutions of higher education, there are also representatives of the social partners. At the end of 1999, the accreditation board not only issued criteria for the admission of suitable institutions as accreditation agencies, but also criteria and general minimum standards for the accreditation procedures to be carried out by these agencies. According to these criteria and standards, for a course of study to be accredited, it has among other things to be demonstrated that it is based on a logical training concept for achieving a recognised vocational qualification.

Definition of standards at tertiary level

All courses at higher education level are regulated by study and examination regulations and supplemented by courses of study which are developed by the institutions of higher education and their competent faculties or schools. Before they enter into force, the examination regulations must be approved by the relevant Land ministry. Apart from the legal requirements which have to be complied with, the regulations are based on general or specialised framework regulations of the Conference of Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs (KMK) and, if necessary, courses of study in the form of recommendations are to be taken into account. This should ensure that there are certain specifics and minimum standards as well as a certain uniformity of similar courses of study throughout the country. This cannot be done however by aligning to standards in a single classification system valid for all vocational qualifications together.

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[19] Federal Statistical Office (1997) *Internationale bildungsstatistishe Grundlagen – Vergleich der Bildungssysteme ausgewählter europäischer Länder unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der beruflichen Bildung und Hochschulbildung*, published by Metzler und Poeschel, Stuttgart, Wiesbaden.

([20]) German Science Council (Wissenschaftsrat, WR) (2000), *Empfehlungen zur Einführung neuer Studienstrukturen und -abschlüsse (Bakkalaureus/Bachelor – Magister/Master) in Deutschland*, Berlin, Decision of 21 January 2000.

The standards are generally scientifically or training-related and not vocational or activity-related. They are supplemented by other criteria, including:

- the admission requirements;

- the period of time within which a student should complete his studies;

- the total investment in terms of hours of teaching per semester week;

- the scope and procedure of the studies and examinations;

- the description of the degree in question.

Training standards vary enormously from subject to subject. It is fundamentally true for all courses of study that they should qualify the student for a vocation on an academic basis. This generally does not mean that they will be trained for very narrow vocational activities. In many academic disciplines this is therefore already not possible because the subject does not correspond to any clearly defined vocational activities. Even where a fairly strong vocational relationship does exist, an attempt is made to equip the student with a broad technical basis and qualify him to meet the demands of various situations. In addition to specialist knowledge and method skills, attempts are increasingly being made to teach social and communicative skills that can be used in many situations. More markedly vocational or job-related specialisations in the context of a speciality, generally to be selected by the student himself, only apply as an example of an attempt to learn how people learn and become specialised in technical fields or tasks, and is not concrete preparation for a certain vocational activity in the selected speciality. Where the standards of the tertiary sector are concerned, it is generally specialised standards belonging to the academic discipline or field in question which apply, rather than work or vocationally-related standards. This is also increasingly true for Fachhochschulen, although there technical know-how and the competences to be developed are targeted more towards vocational reality. Field-related and vocationally-related standards are most frequently seen in the dual training courses run by the vocational colleges and, as a recent development, in individual Fachhochschulen with alternating study programmes and on average a 50% proportion of training in practice. And yet even here the orientation is often not towards activity-related standards, such as complexity of the tasks or extent of responsibility or lists of competences, but towards technical content and method knowledge and towards the practical and theoretical level to be reached in the process.

Educational statistics as the foundation for a classification system

Although there is no uniform system of classification of vocational degrees or qualifications in Germany, it can be assumed that with the recognised occupations that require training and schooling, the occupations that require in-service training, for example to master craftsman and technician's level, and the higher education degrees, three clearly distinguishable levels of knowledge and competences and the levels of qualifications to be attained for this, do

indeed exist in the minds of the public and potential users.

A further differentiating classification of the vocational qualification at tertiary level in Germany is made primarily in the context of the official statistics of the Bund and of the Länder and in the context of higher education statistics, which are drawn up by the Conference of University Rectors. The distinguishing characteristics used in these systems refer to criteria such as type of higher education institutions, branches of study, type of degree, duration of study or entry qualifications. In the tertiary training sector and the higher education sector, a distinction by levels is not officially made in the statistics. Only through the type of institution in conjunction with the type of degree and the course of study graduated in can one obtain some idea about the qualification profiles and – as has already been described – about levels with regard to activities placed in a hierarchy. This is particularly true for careers and entry levels in public service.

Training and higher education statistics classify and quantify the training outcomes, predominantly linked to training institutions. However, for the person enquiring about training courses, the users of qualifications and the planners and providers of training courses, they do not however constitute a particularly informative classification system.

Procedures in the development, implementation and updating of standards, courses of study and educational qualifications at tertiary level

At tertiary level, the development of standards and new courses and the updating of current curricula and final examinations stems predominantly from the institutions of higher education (Hochschulen) themselves. For the most part, the State only prescribes a formal framework. In the case of courses which conclude with examinations set by State-run examination boards, such as in medicine and law and in the various teaching courses, there are however detailed and compulsory subjects.

The impetus for new or revised courses of study can come from new scientific developments as well as innovations in the different fields of application. Increasingly frequently, new courses of study are also initiated due to changes in the qualification requirements and the demand for qualifications from the labour market.

The more practice-orientated or vocational the courses, the more representatives from the areas in question are involved in the initiation, development or changing of the courses available. At tertiary level, this applies mainly to courses in vocational training institutions, about half of which are taken in companies in industry. To a varying extent, this also applies to the Fachhochschulen (colleges of higher education), which increasingly are trying to achieve practical orientation by integrating practical stages and alternating or cooperative courses of study, by application-orientated research and technology transfer and the creation of regional contacts. An increasing orientation towards the qualifications needed in industry and due to developments in the labour market can be seen from the rapid growth in technical

further education and additional postgraduate courses of further education.

Unlike in the area of the recognised training professions and further education professions, at present it is not yet planned for there to be a direct and institutionalised participation of representatives from industry (social partners) in the development and updating of courses of study and in the definition of qualification standards in most courses of study at tertiary level. Rather, consideration of the requirements of industry and the labour market takes place indirectly, for example by way of market analyses, the questioning of experts, expert reports, graduate studies, company and association reports, and through research into vocations and qualifications. Greater direct participation with the social partners and the representatives from professional and specialist associations should ensue in the future with the introduction of the accreditation procedures which have already been referred to. This is a first step towards greater participation from both sides of industry and may result in the social partners also being more involved in future in the development of new courses of study.

Because the initiative for new courses and the updating of existing courses generally comes from the individual and largely autonomous higher education institutions, there is a tendency for a situation of great variety in the types and standards of education. This is regarded as an advantage insofar as it enables a rapid and flexible reaction to new requirements and ensures competition between the courses available, which promotes quality. One of the objectives of current higher education policy in Germany is to encourage competition between the institutions and the development of independent profiles.

Potential disadvantages of a lack of transparency and comparability and a possible failure to achieve quality standards should be prevented by the prescribing of framework conditions for studies and examinations, which serve as recommendations throughout the country for all the higher education institutions concerned and are approved in the course of the required approval procedure by the responsible Land ministry. Compulsory frameworks for the structuring of courses of study and examinations, which are for the most part of a formal nature, are also contained in the federal laws applying to these institutions.

Approval for regulations on studies and examinations is generally only given for a certain period of time, so that when an extension is applied for, the courses can at the same time also be updated and, perhaps due to changes in the law, must in fact be carried out. Irrespective of the expiry of a term of approval, the higher education institutions are however free at any time to introduce new standards, change regulations on studies and examinations and to obtain approval for this.

As regards the question as to by what procedures the standards for the course of study and final examinations are laid down at tertiary level, a distinction can be made in accordance with the criterion of the area of validity and the nature of the standards:

Standards which apply throughout the country

At this level, it is largely formal criteria which apply, which are regulated by law or

regulations, for example:

- the normal period of study, which varies depending on the type of higher education institution or course;

- the possible access routes, depending on the type of higher education institution or course;

- the possible leaving examinations, depending on the higher education institution or course;

- the conditions and tests needed to pass the final examination.

A standard in terms of content, but which is formulated in general terms, can be seen in the legally set educational task of the individual types of higher education institution or in the functions which go beyond the educational task, for example in scientific research. The relevant legislative and State bodies are responsible for determining and changing these criteria, which moreover also substantially characterise the classification scheme of the statistics applying to higher education. The participation of groups from society or representatives from the institutions in legislative procedures takes place mainly through public hearings.

Specialist or vocation-related standards which apply to all higher education institutions

These standards provide frameworks for the various courses of study and final examinations, partly regarding content and partly formal in nature. This takes place in State-regulated courses and examinations through compulsory provisions in the form of laws and regulations, and in the case of State-recognised final examinations in higher education institutions in the form of recommendations decided at State level on diploma or Masters examinations. In particular, the framework examination regulations, already referred to, for individual courses of study, which are decided upon by the Conference of Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder (KMK), frequently give more detailed indications as to:

- the qualification objectives aimed at;

- the necessary range of education and subjects;

- the practical elements required;

- the total number of hours devoted to individual subjects or part study courses;

- the number of examinations, the subject area and the requirements of the examinations;

- a time framework and what is required in terms of content in the final examination work.

ven though essentially all courses should be vocational in nature, when formulating standards regarding content, very often scientific and education-related standards predominate. Only in

the case of courses with a strong vocational orientation, such as in the case of engineering, increasingly qualification objectives are at the forefront, which are orientated towards specific requirements of the professional activities or job-related descriptions of competence. This applies among other things to key qualifications to be aimed at, such as abilities in terms of communications and cooperation or problem-solving and transferability. Despite changes in the framework conditions, which can be described under the catchphrase with the change *from education for the elite to education for the masses*, the universities in particular often still tend to see vocational qualifications preferably in terms of qualification through and on behalf of research, that is in the narrower sense for scientific research.

The reason why scientifically-orientated standards still continue to figure prominently in the universities lies among other things in the procedure through which the framework conditions come about. Separated by type of institution and study direction, the standards regarding content are developed by bodies such as the *Fakultätentagen* (for the universities) and *Fachbereichstagen* (for the colleges of higher education) in which representatives of the subject concerned from the higher education institutions dominate and representatives from industry are usually only consulted in an advisory capacity. In the development of their courses through these framework conditions, some higher education institutions see themselves hindered rather than encouraged in defining standards which are orientated more towards practice and later professional activity and in implementing them in the education provided.

There is however the expectation that with the introduction of the accreditation procedures referred to, which initially are only to be tested with the new Bachelor and Masters courses, increasingly, practice-related and vocation-related standards, formulated as outcome-orientated standards, will be implemented with regard to the minimum requirements which must be met. The accreditation procedures, including the definition of the criteria and standards to be applied, which must be completed first, are to be carried out by the accreditation agencies which are to be created. Depending on the study direction, or type of occupation, these agencies are to have a strong representation from vocational practice, and less from the higher education institutions. In connection with the introduction of a consecutive study structure, in defining the standards, the question of the need for clearly distinguishable levels or clearly distinguishable profiles, which go beyond the differentiations possible with the level ISCED 5, should again be discussed.

In general, it can be said that in Germany, the laying down, further development and implementation of standards regarding content in vocational training at tertiary level, as in vocational training at secondary level, is currently orientated not towards all-embracing criteria, for example comprehensive lists of competences or classification criteria. The process takes place differently depending on the vocational training or scientific discipline concerned.

Standards specific to higher education institutions

Despite the legal and more or less compulsory or recommended frameworks referred to above, the educational establishments at tertiary level have relatively wide scope for determining the profile of the courses they offer themselves and the educational objectives to be aimed at in these courses. It is the individual departments in the universities and colleges of higher education which are responsible. Frameworks within the universities can also be partly put in place. Within the framework of the conditions referred to above, the individual faculties are, apart from the courses of study ending with State examinations, free to decide what specific standards they wish to achieve with their courses and in particular how they wish to obtain these. Within this framework, they can also decide to what extent they take into consideration specific requirements due to practical application, the labour market, regional contacts and internationalisation, etc. This also applies to the way in which they express such context-related requirements in the form of educational objectives. Increasingly, the students themselves, for example through the use of the module approach and the choice of their main areas of emphasis, have the opportunity to mould their own individual qualification profiles.

Meanwhile, because of this scope for shaping courses, the specific educational objectives achieved by the individual higher education institution or by the individual student, and in particular the outcomes, are less transparent in the detail and are not recorded either by the statistics of the institutions nor by any other form of classification of qualifications. Rather, they are identified and recognised in personnel recruitment procedures in companies and the assessment methods they employ or in the assessment of qualifications with regard to continuing courses of education, for example for courses leading to a doctorate. As these assessments of qualifications of individuals are not normally recorded, they cannot really be used for classification purposes or for national or international recognition procedures. It is expected that in the short term a better classification and international transparency of qualifications will ensue from instruments such as the European diploma supplement ([21]). At tertiary level, with improved international classification systems, a European regulation on accreditation and international measures on quality assessment and assurance in certain fields of activity and occupations could also contribute to greater transparency and a common agreement on standards and their implementation in different education processes in the medium term.

The importance of the EU's 5-level system of 1985

With regard to the tertiary level of the education system and the vocational qualification processes in the system, the European 5-level structure, and in this connection in particular

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([21]) University Rectors' Conference (HRK) (1999), the HRK has developed easy-to-use software obtainable from the higher education institutions on the introduction of the *Diploma Supplement*, Bonn, HRK-Press release of 10 November 1999.

the definition of level 5 in Germany, has at no time received greater attention. Certain problems relating to inadequate international recognition of German education courses have been settled at the right time within the meaning of this structure, for example by changing the higher technical colleges into colleges of higher education and classifying them quite clearly at university level or as establishments of higher education.

Problems which still exist with regard to national and international recognition and the comparability of final examinations or qualifications which have been obtained at tertiary level cannot be solved just by this classification system, because in relation to the tertiary level as a whole there is too little differentiation. Even the relatively greater opportunities for differentiation, as provided by levels 5 and 6 of the ISCED, are inadequate for this. This is why there are now renewed discussions at national and international level as to whether instead of different profiles at level 5, both with regard to the demand for qualifications and to the classification of existing or new final examinations to be developed, additional levels should be defined.

Clarification is also required as to the extent to which certain shorter courses at tertiary level should be assigned to level 4. It appears that so far consideration has not been given to all postgraduate qualifications ([22]) which do not lead to research work in the narrower sense and therefore are not to be assigned to level 6 of the ISCED, but which are however essential requirements for certain professions, such as for example the training period required for teachers and those in the legal profession, the doctor in practice in the case of medical students or the necessary experience in practice and further education before admittance as a member of a professional association and therefore to practising a profession independently, such as in the case of architects. Similarly, this also applies to such supplementary courses of study which while not being absolutely essential for practising a profession, do however represent a significant extension to a student's professional qualifications, such as for example the courses leading to an MBA (Master of Business Administration) for which there is an increasing demand. All other forms of professional further education which are not represented in courses of study, and which are therefore less formalised, and prior and informal learning are also not taken into consideration, insofar as they cannot be obtained from first examinations at level 5 which qualify for a profession.

The employment system in Germany is currently sending out strong messages to make the qualification structures at tertiary level more transparent with new classification systems with other criteria, for example orientated towards qualifications and competences, and in this matter to discuss again also the question of the levels which are necessary or sensible. However, the impetus for this debate stems increasingly from the problems of the international recognition of qualifications and final leaving examinations and from initiatives in education and higher education policy. The most recent examples are the Sorbonne and the Bologna Declarations which have already been referred to.

([22]) In the context of supplementary courses or courses of further study.

Of note also are attempts in individual areas, such as in engineering, at European level within the framework of accreditation procedures or transnational quality evaluations or even a ranking, to make the qualifications of the individual educational establishments and the information content of degrees more transparent. This also includes orientating the future development to subject benchmarks or common accreditation standards and, in addition, by way of means such as the European Diploma Supplement or a standard Record of Professional Achievement or Portfolio, being able to demonstrate the competences of each individual with the aid of descriptions or standards related to education or vocation, thus differentiating between competences and creating transparency.

Efforts in this direction would also enable outcomes from informal and non-formal learning to be adequately taken into consideration, which in Germany does not happen sufficiently at present at all levels of vocational training, including training at tertiary level ([23]).

3. The categorisation of qualifications at tertiary level in England, France, the Netherlands and Spain

Unlike in Germany, in some of these countries systems for classifying qualifications are designed so as to enable the categorisation of all vocational qualifications, including those at the tertiary level of the education system. This applies in the case of France, but also applies to England in line with demand, although less to the Netherlands and Spain. Nevertheless, these systems generally do not allow particularly differentiated categorisation, as they often provide for only one, or a maximum of 3 of the usual 5 or 6 levels for qualifications in the higher education system. The difficulties of categorisation clearly increase with the degree to which the different levels are defined not on the basis of training-related but vocational or activity-related criteria. It is true that the higher education institutions are increasingly willing to become involved with outcome-orientated standards, but predominantly these remain attached to training or specialist subject-related criteria.

In some countries there is a growing trend towards developing an independent classification system for degrees or part qualifications at the tertiary level of the education system, separate from vocational qualifications at secondary level, and to provide a larger number of levels in order to take into account the increasing diversification in this area. This development can be seen above all from discussions and developments in the United Kingdom, especially in England and Wales, and correspondingly also in Scotland. For this reason, this development will be discussed in greater detail below, while the other countries will be discussed only briefly.

([23]) Cf. Bjornavold loc.cit.

3.1 England and Wales

With the NVQ system, England, and with the SVQ system Scotland as well, have sought to include all professional qualifications, including those at the tertiary level of the education system, in a single, uniform, 5-level classification system, and to describe the standards in the form of vocational or activity-related competences. As these competences are intended to be assessed on the basis of performance criteria and outcomes, in principle they are separated from the institutional or even informal forms in which they have been generated. In the NVQ system, level 5 addresses competences which normally are acquired in the course of higher education culminating in the first degree. Level 4 includes competences which can be acquired in sub-degree programmes, but which can already be introduced at tertiary level.

There have, however, been problems in developing NVQs at level 4 and in particular at level 5 and in relating the current system of university degrees to the NVQ system. Most universities saw their autonomy in the development of academic standards and the awarding of degrees threatened. Moreover, they felt that the system based on competences and units was not suitable for appropriately understanding and categorising the whole, complex, scientific education in universities and polytechnics ([24]), which in many subject areas related to professions which are rich in traditions.

The Dearing Report in 1997 takes the growing lack of transparency of qualifications, in particular in postgraduate education, as an opportunity to propose an independent National Qualifications Framework for the tertiary level in which the traditional degrees, but also the NVQs of levels 4 and 5, are categorised, as shown by the summary below ([25]). At present, a consultation process organised by the "Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA)" is underway, in which the groups or persons concerned or involved were asked to comment by 20.12.99 on detailed proposals on the formation of this structure, after which a final plan would be presented in the year 2000.

([24]) Which have, moreover, all become universities in the meantime.

([25]) National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education (NCIHE) (1997), *Education in the Learning Society*, The Dearing Report, London, HMSO.

Chart 10.1 - A qualification framework

	Type of programme		Level		Qualification Title		NVQ
	Taught/Research		H8	-	Doctorate	- - - -	Level 5
	Taught/Research		H7	-	Mphil	- - - -	Level 5
	S, P or C		H6	-	Masters degree	- - - -	Level 5
A ▲	S, P, C or Conversion		H5	-	Higher Honours/ Postgraduate conversion Diploma	- -	Level 4/5
	S, P or C		H4	-	Honours degree	- - - -	Level 4
A ▲	S, P or B		H3	-	Bachelors degree	- - - -	Level 4
HND	S, P or B		H2	-	Diploma	- - - -	Level 4
HNC	S, P or B		H1	-	Certificate	- - - -	Level 3/4

Notes:

1. Each level up to H4 would require et least 120 additional credit points.
2. Students pursuing broad programmes at level H1, H2 and H3 and securing 360 credit points would be awarded a Bachelor's degree.
3. To gain an Honours degree would require at least 360 specialist credit points. The rate of progress would depend on the amount of previous specialisation.
4. It would be for each institution, consulting as appropriate with the professional bodies, to determine the pattern of credits (e.g. how much specialisation or how much breadth) required to qualify for an Honours degree.

Type of programme

A = Accelerated route if correct number of specialist credit points acquired

S = Single subject

C = Combined subjects

B = Broad range of subjects

P = Subject leading to professional status

Conversion = postgraduate conversion course

From the diagram it is clear that a differentiation into 8 levels is only considered appropriate for the tertiary level. The levels are education-orientated, superficially by years of study, but in fact are based on credit points. Each level up to level H4 requires at least 120 points. Students pursuing broad programmes at levels H1, H2 and H3 and securing 360 credit points through the successful completion of corresponding modules are awarded a Bachelor's degree. To gain an Honours degree, which is a degree of greater merit, at least 360 specialist

credit points are required. The period of study can vary and depends among other things on whether credits of the type required have been obtained previously.

A distinction is also made between different types of education programme:

A = Accelerated and early degree as soon as the required number of specialist credit points have been acquired

S = Education in a single subject

C = Education in combined subjects

B = Education in a broad range of subjects

P = Education in a single subject, leading to professional status

A conversion programme is available if, in the course of postgraduate education, for example leading to a Masters degree, the subject area is changed by the student and, for example, a Bachelor in the engineering sciences wishes to obtain a Masters in Business Administration (MBA).

In defining the education objectives, the universities still have a great deal of autonomy in developing independent qualification profiles. But there is a plan to define minimum standards in all subject areas through so-called subject benchmarking. These standards should primarily be defined in terms of subject area, not in relation to activities or professions. But they should also be distinguished in accordance with the individual levels, which is reflected in the courses and degrees in which, depending on the degree being studied for, credits or different levels must be obtained.

Wherever the education programmes can be related to future activities or professions, it is expected that through accreditation procedures by the relevant institutions, occupation-related components can be included in the definition of standards of the corresponding university education or levels. But only through supplementing the further acquisition of competences, for instance through guided practical experience (Initial Professional Development - IPD) and further training in the case of engineers, can the standard set by the profession in question be achieved. This then leads to registration with the corresponding professional association and to entitlement to an additional title (in the case of engineers, for example, this would be chartered engineer). In the case of engineers, the new version of the Standards and Routes to Registration (SARTOR) in the relevant professional association of all the umbrella associations of all the engineers' associations (the Engineering Council), provides, in addition to a route to becoming a chartered engineer, also for a route which is more practically-orientated but not so demanding in terms of the studies involved, a route to becoming an incorporated engineer.

As far as quality assurance is concerned, the educational institutions should make it clear through so-called programme specifications by what learning and teaching means and examinations and assessments certain standards and outcomes should be achieved. Assuring stan-

dards and quality is in the first instance the responsibility of the institution concerned, but at regular intervals is tested by means of an external evaluation. "Assurance must be provided that each higher education institution is discharging effectively its responsibilities as a body granting awards that have national and international standing"([26]). From this, it is clear that in future the international dimension of standards and degrees is to be explicitly included. This is reinforced by an express reference to the corresponding European initiatives in the latest contributions from the national quality assurance agency (QAA) (21).

3.2 France

Since 1969, France has had a standardised classification system for employees relating to qualifications with a total of 6 levels, which with levels I, II and III also includes the tertiary level of the education system. They correspond to a consecutive organisation of these levels in cycles. Level III refers to *premier cycle* qualifications of the higher education system after 2 years' education and to equivalent degrees, such as the Diploma of the *Institutes Universitaires de Technologie* (IUT). Level II is orientated towards the qualifications after the second cycle of university studies after a period of education of 4 years, and level I to the qualifications beyond, such as doctorate qualifications. To characterise qualifications, frequently use is also made of those years of education which, after obtaining the baccalauréat, are necessary as a more or less special academic standard required for university entrance until the end of the period of study, for example BAC + 2 for the D.U.T ([27]).

While this classification system enables qualifications to be categorised into levels, it hardly enables any conclusions to be reached as to the educational or professional knowledge, skills and competences which have been acquired. This is all the more so as it is precisely in the higher education system in France that there is a variety of educational establishments, education programmes and qualifications and, not least, differences in quality, about which it is difficult to obtain a clear overview. This latter issue is due in part to the different practices and results of the selection of those starting their studies and existing students and the increasing differences between a public university system characterised by problems of size, and the highly selective sector of relatively small specialist higher education institutions (grandes écoles), some of which have a long tradition and a good reputation.

From this, it follows that in an international comparison, the definitions of the levels are only comparable to a limited extent, even if superficially this may appear to be the case, for example comparing the French level III with the English "NVQ-level 3". Even less can the qualifications assigned to these levels in a national context be regarded as equivalent on a transnational scale. This would only be possible by taking into consideration the standard of education

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([26]) QAA, *Consultative Paper, loc.cit.*

([27]) Diplome Universitaire de Technologies.

striven for with the final qualifications or attained by proven outcomes.

Because of the great diversification, in France these standards can hardly be described as being related to levels and generally not even to the type of higher education institution, but often only in relation to the individual institution or even individual education programmes. For some qualifications at tertiary level, however, minimum standards are assured through accreditation or validation procedures and increasingly the standards are assured through accreditation or validation procedures and increasingly the standards which are actually achieved are made public through an evaluation procedure. The more internationally known procedures include the practices on the definition and implementation of standards of the French *Commission des Titres d'Ingénieur* (CTI), which has existed since 1934, for the recognition of the training of engineers. Aimed originally in particular at the stringently restrictive assurance of standards and quality of the Grandes Ecoles, the activity of the CTI has in the meantime also extended to other types of qualifications in the field of engineering ([28]).

3.3 The Netherlands

The new Dutch classification system for vocational qualifications with its 4 levels refers to the secondary level of the education system. For the sake of completeness, using the same criteria as in the other levels (degree of responsibility, complexity and transfer potential), an attempt has been made also to define a level 5, to which qualifications from the tertiary education system should refer. According to this, the activity for which a qualification is sought is described as follows: "An occupational practitioner (professional) is responsible for his own work and has to account for his own actions (to colleagues, non-hierarchical). Work can involve both applying and combining/devising complex procedures and applying, combining/devising standard procedures for a range of activities. Additionally a professional bears responsibility not in an executive sense (i.e. monitoring and supervision), but rather in a formal, organisational sense. Work implies specialised, occupation independent skills and knowledge. A professional devises new procedures, tactical and strategic actions and skills with regard to policy development and execution" ([29]).

The tertiary level with its binary structure does, however, meet other classification criteria which – as in Germany – are directed rather at the higher education type of institution and the corresponding education programmes with university degrees on the one hand and *Hogeren Scholen for Beroepsonderwijs* ([30]) within the framework of higher vocational training (HBO) on the other. As in Germany, entitlement to access to these at the secondary school level is

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([28]) Commission de Titres d'Ingénieur (CTI) (1998), *References and Orientations*, Paris 1998.

([29]) Westerhuis, A. (2000): *The Structure of Training Levels revisited*, CIRETOQ-CINOP project, final report, s'Hertogenbosch (draft manuscript).

([30]) These are largely comparable with the Fachhochschulen in Germany and have undergone a development.

different from that of general access to higher education institutions. Meanwhile, students are being admitted to the *Open University* in Heerlen who do not even possess the qualifications which entitle them to the course of study.

There is no other level in the tertiary education system in the Netherlands with its own independent qualifications, apart from the fact that a postgraduate level follows the doctorate degrees of the universities and the HBO qualifications, in which courses of further study, but also studies at doctorate level, are established.

The first year of higher education in the HBO and the universities, which is called the *Propaedeuse* ([31]), leads to an (intermediate) examination and does not represent an independent, recognised qualification.

Following an international comparison, in which the HBO degrees were categorised similarly to those of the German Fachhochschulen at the level of Bachelor and Honours degrees, and the university degrees compared with the Masters degrees, the HBO has recently gone on to introduce supplementary Masters degree courses as postgraduate courses. In the meantime, the universities on the other hand are showing little inclination to establish a qualification level for the degree of Bachelor. Not under the designation of Bachelor, but under the designation of *Kandidaat*, they are able to award a degree after three years of study with a corresponding examination. As most courses leading to a PhD have been cut back to a study period of four years, it is assumed that an intermediate degree is of interest only for the few 5-year courses, such as engineering. It is also expected that for the time being this would apply less to a specially profiled entry into professional activity, but rather to an intermediate level and entry for students with other, in particular Bachelor degrees, for example from other countries, on their way to undertaking the subsequent part of their studies ([32]).

The discussion about increased internationalisation – and recently the Bologna Declaration – have, however, given rise to considerations also in the Netherlands as to the extent to which the reference structures and levels of higher education or tertiary education recommended there should be adopted.. As in Germany, the question is raised as to whether in the longer term the existing structures and levels of the current binary system should be replaced by more of an Anglo-American consecutive basic structure or whether courses of the Bachelor or Masters type with an international orientation should be added rather in a supplementary way and in the current Dutch degrees the international comparison should be made more marked. In very general terms, the Netherlands is characterised by its great interest in greater international orientation of its general and vocational education.

([31]) Propaedeutic.

([32]) Ministerie van Onderwijs, Cultuur en Wetenschapen [Ministry of Education, Cultural Affairs and Science] (1999), *Hoger Onderwijs en Onderzoek 2000*, The Hague, September 1999.

In the development of education standards and programmes, the higher education institutions, particularly the universities, continue to enjoy considerable autonomy. The programmes offered by the HBOs do not necessarily need to be orientated towards the new 5-level classification of the standards of vocational qualifications referred to at the beginning. They arise generally through cooperation with the relevant professional associations and then require State approval. There is no independent accreditation system with strong influence from the professional associations. However, at present the HBOs in particular are making great efforts with regard to the standards and recognition of the Masters programmes they have developed for the setting up of a so-called *Dutch Validation Council* ([33]) (26). For certain professions (such as teachers, doctors, judges and attorneys), State registration or approval is required, which normally is only given when specific additional post-doctoral educational requirements have been met or experience acquired.

In order to ensure the quality of education standards at tertiary level, the Netherlands, i.e. the Dutch higher education institutions represented by the VSNU (for the universities) and the Hochschulraad (HBO), started back in the 1980s with building up a system for assessing the quality of study programmes based on a combination of internal self-evaluation and an external evaluation by peers. At regular intervals, they evaluate all the national courses on offer in one subject area and make public the results ([34]). This concept has become a model for many countries in Europe and has been the force behind a European pilot programme for the introduction and testing of quality assessments, the results of which have been available since 1996.

3.4 Spain

The national classification system which is at present in the introductory phase in theory is intended to include all levels, including that of higher education, following the 5-level system of the EU qualifications. At present, however, efforts are concentrated on the vocational qualifications at secondary level (levels 2 and 3) and the question as to whether in determining levels (standards) the orientation should be towards the (continental Europe) approach of fairly broad competence profiles or the British NVQ concept of a determination of qualifications and levels related rather to specific activities. For the present, the qualifications at tertiary level are not affected by this argument.

These qualifications are predominantly national qualifications in the university system, namely the *Licentiatura* - degrees or vocational degrees as an *Ingeniero* or Arquitecto, which after 4-5 years of study are awarded only by the *Facultades* of the universities or the *Escuelas*

([33]) Dutch Validation Council (D.V.C.) (1998), *Manual for the validation of Master Courses*, published by the HBO Board.

([34]) Op.cit.

Técnicas Superiores (EST) and are included in the masters level. There are also degrees as *Diplomado, Ingeniero Técnico* or *Arquitecto Técnico* after 2 to 3 years of study awarded by the *Escuelas Universitarias (ES).* In Spain it is assumed that these qualifications correspond to levels 4 and 5 of the European 5-level system.

With the increase in demand, the diversification of programmes and qualifications is also increasing in Spain. In addition to the State degrees in the university system, there is a growing number of shorter courses and also of private institutions offering courses not in the university sector. Taking advantage of their greater autonomy under the higher education law of 1983, the universities also offer programmes which lead to university-specific degrees, but which are not recognised by the State, which do however enable them to respond flexibly to the changing demands of the labour market.

If Doctorate degrees are included, a distinction can be made in Spain between 3 levels at the tertiary stage, but it is not clear whether the *Diplomado* degrees correspond more to a sub degree level, and thus to level 4 of the EU system, or already to a differentiated degree level of level 5.

In the development of education standards and the recognition of qualifications, the Ministry of Education and Science has influence of prime importance. There is no special system for the accreditation of programmes or degrees and a participation of the professional associations which is frequently connected with this. Nevertheless, in Spain, too, efforts are increasing to introduce internal and external evaluation measures in order to ensure quality, which would help to improve the transparency of outcomes and therefore of international comparability.

4. Conclusions and prospects

The growing dynamics of the development of tertiary education, which can be observed internationally, and its increasing diversification at European level, have given rise to discussions as to how the transparency of qualifications and their adequate categorisation in all-embracing classification systems can be ensured at national and transnational level and as to how international recognition can be achieved. Behind this is the increasing importance of qualifications at this level for economic and social development in view of the international interlinking of markets and increasingly also of labour markets.

Just when for different reasons – as decided for the EU – harmonisation is not being pursued explicitly, and the great variety of qualifications, and in particular the different ways of obtaining them, should be maintained, the creation of transparency is an essential condition for ensuring recognition of outcomes and degrees, of cooperation in research, teaching and further education and of the mobility of students and graduates.

Different routes are being taken to improve the transparency and comparability of qualifications in higher education. One method, among others, is the development and implementation of suitable classification systems for the qualifications which can be obtained or have been obtained at tertiary level. They would have to be compatible and understandable on an international level and ideally also meet education, training and labour market requirements. The current practice at tertiary level in the education system to fix qualifications to educational institutions, their programmes and degrees alone, as is the case in Germany, is insufficient for this. At best it is meaningful for insiders, provided that educational institutions (for example universities, colleges of higher education and polytechnics) allow themselves to be connected with standards applying to all the Hochschulen and throughout the country, and related to the type of Hochschule in question. This procedure proves to be all the more unsatisfactory as diversification of qualifications and the individualisation of education continues and the more the profile and quality-orientated differentiation of courses causes common factors related to the type of Hochschule to be pushed into the background.

At the tertiary level of the education system as well, the requirement in the formulation of educational standards is increasingly towards developing outcome-orientated standards and also enabling degrees or certain sub-degrees to be ranked. As in many subject areas, in particular those of the humanities and social sciences, relationships to jobs are not always clear and even in vocationally-orientated subjects a fairly general approach forms the basis of an academic education, in many areas these standards will be orientated towards specialist subject outcomes and less towards future vocational activities.

It is becoming apparent that for various reasons the development of an independent classification system for tertiary level degrees makes sense, as is currently being developed particularly in the United Kingdom with an 8-level system. The discussion about the need for and the sensible number of levels in the higher education system has recently been reopened by the Sorbonne Declaration and the Bologna Declaration. The distinction recommended there into a graduate and a postgraduate area, or the frequently cited ranking after 3, 5 and 8 years of education indicates 2 or 3 levels are sufficient. Criteria for defining these levels would however in the first place be years spent studying, not however the standards of the outcomes or competences aimed at or achieved. These would unquestionably have to be connected with a similar reference structure of a European higher education system if they are to be helpful for the purposes of transparency and reciprocal recognition of qualifications.

German considerations and concepts on the modularisation of courses on the accreditation of Bachelor and Masters courses and an external quality assessment show an increasing orientation towards outcome-based standards. The same can also be said for England, France and the Netherlands, with additional impetus, particularly in France but also in England, coming from efforts concerning the validation of prior, experiental non-formal and informal learning.

A gap in the reference structure recommended in the Bologna Declaration lies in the fact that no statements were made about the increasingly important, shorter, usually two-year courses at the so-called sub-degree level following the extension and differentiation of vocational

training at tertiary level. In some countries these are still considered part of the qualifications of vocational training in the narrower sense and are not considered as part of higher education. Apart from that, however, it has been established for the reference structure now proposed, and apparently very easy, which signals convergence in Europe, that it in no way corresponds to the current realities and development trends in their very great variety ([35]).

The signatory countries have given themselves 2 years to introduce initial conversion steps and a total of 10 years to implement the structures and possibly a classification system or framework of qualifications aimed at this. However it may be doubtful whether this system leading to convergence is in keeping with an assurance of variety which is also wanted, with regard to different requirements, contexts and cultural traditions. Certainly further measures are necessary for the development and securing of standards and for guaranteeing transparency and recognition of present and future qualifications.

It also has to be guaranteed that the courses at higher education level for people coming in through the back door and from unconventional directions, and for those participating in further education and adult education, will be more readily able to be incorporated into these qualification frameworks in the context of the extension of the opportunities for lifelong learning and will no longer only be based predominantly on the length of the period of study and the type of entitlement to access.

([35]) CRE, Confederation of European Union Rectors' Conferences and the Association of European Universities (1999), *Trends in Learning Structures in Higher Education*, Project Report of 7 June 1999, contribution to the Bologna Forum.

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Annexes

Annex I:

Sorbonne Declaration

Joint declaration on harmonisation of the architecture of the European higher education system by the four Ministers in charge for France, Germany, Italy and the United Kingdom

Paris, the Sorbonne, May 25 1998

The European process has very recently moved some extremely important steps ahead. Relevant as they are, they should not make one forget that Europe is not only that of the Euro, of the banks and the economy: it must be a Europe of knowledge as well. We must strengthen and build upon the intellectual, cultural, social and technical dimensions of our continent. These have to a large extent been shaped by its universities, which continue to play a pivotal role for their development.

Universities were born in Europe, some three-quarters of a millenium ago. Our four countries boast some of the oldest, who are celebrating important anniversaries around now, as the University of Paris is doing today. In those times, students and academics would freely circulate and rapidly disseminate knowledge throughout the continent. Nowadays, too many of our students still graduate without having had the benefit of a study period outside of national boundaries.

We are heading for a period of major change in education and working conditions, to a diversification of courses of professional careers with education and training throughout life becoming a clear obligation. We owe our students, and our society at large, a higher education system in which they are given the best opportunities to seek and find their own area of excellence.

An open European area for higher learning carries a wealth of positive perspectives, of course respecting our diversities, but requires on the other hand continuous efforts to remove barriers and to develop a framework for teaching and learning, which would enhance mobility and an ever closer cooperation.

The international recognition and attractive potential of our systems are directly related to their external and internal readabilities. A system, in which two main cycles, undergraduate and graduate, should be recognized for international comparison and equivalence, seems to emerge.

Much of the originality and flexibility in this system will be achieved through the use of credits (such as in the ECTS scheme) and semesters. This will allow for validation of these acquired credits for those who choose initial or continued education in different European

universities and wish to be able to acquire degrees in due time throughout life. Indeed, students should be able to enter the academic world at any time in their professional life and from diverse backgrounds.

Undergraduates should have access to a diversity of programmes, including opportunities for multidisciplinary studies, development of a proficiency in languages and the ability to use new information technologies.

International recognition of the first cycle degree as an appropriate level of qualification is important for the success of this endeavour, in which we wish to make our higher education schemes clear to all.

In the graduate cycle there would be a choice between a shorter master's degree and a longer doctor's degree, with possibilities to transfer from one to the other. In both graduate degrees, appropriate emphasis would be placed on research and autonomous work.

At both undergraduate and graduate level, students would be encouraged to spend at least one semester in universities outside their own country. At the same time, more teaching and research staff should be working in European countries other than their own. The fast growing support of the European Union, for the mobility of students and teachers should be employed to the full.

Most countries, not only within Europe, have become fully conscious of the need to foster such evolution. The conferences of European rectors, University presidents, and groups of experts and academics in our respective countries have engaged in widespread thinking along these lines.

A convention, recognising higher education qualifications in the academic field within Europe, was agreed on last year in Lisbon. The convention set a number of basic requirements and acknowledged that individual countries could engage in an even more constructive scheme. Standing by these conclusions, one can build on them and go further. There is already much common ground for the mutual recognition of higher education degrees for professional purposes through the respective directives of the European Union.

Our governments, nevertheless, continue to have a significant role to play to these ends, by encouraging ways in which acquired knowledge can be validated and respective degrees can be better recognised. We expect this to promote further inter-university agreements. Progressive harmonisation of the overall framework of our degrees and cycles can be achieved through strengthening of already existing experience, joint diplomas, pilot initiatives, and dialogue with all concerned.

We hereby commit ourselves to encouraging a common frame of reference, aimed at improving external recognition and facilitating student mobility as well as employability. The anniversary of the University of Paris, today here in the Sorbonne, offers us a solemn opportunity to engage in the endeavour to create a European area of higher education, where

identities and common interests can interact and strengthen each other for the benefit of Europe, of its students, and more generally of its citizens. We call on other Member States of the Union and other European countries to join us in this objective and on all European Universities to consolidate Europe's standing in the world through continuously improved and updated education for its citizens.

Claude Allègre, Luigi Berlinguer, Tessa Blackstone, Jürgen Ruettgers

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Annex II:

Bologna Declaration

Joint declaration of the European Ministers of Education Convened in Bologna on the 19th of June 1999

The European process, thanks to the extraordinary achievements of the last few years, has become an increasingly concrete and relevant reality for the Union and its citizens. Enlargement prospects, together with deepening relations with other European countries, provide even wider dimensions to that reality. Meanwhile, we are witnessing a growing awareness in large parts of the political and academic world and in public opinion of the need to establish a more complete and far-reaching Europe, in particular building upon and strengthening its intellectual, cultural, social and scientific and technological dimensions.

A Europe of Knowledge is now widely recognised as an irreplaceable factor for social and human growth and as an indispensable component to consolidate and enrich the European citizenship capable of giving its citizens the to necessary competences to face the challenges of the new millennium, together with an awareness of shared values and belonging to a common social and cultural space.

The importance of education and educational co-operation in the development and strengthening of stable, peaceful and democratic societies is universally acknowledged as paramount, the more so in view of the situation in South East Europe.

The Sorbonne Declaration of the 25th of May 1998, which was underpinned by these considerations, stressed the Universities' central role in developing European cultural dimensions. It emphasised the creation of the European area of higher education as a key way to promote citizens' mobility and employability, and the continent's overall development.

Several European countries and accepted the invitation to commit themselves to achieving the objectives set out in the declaration, by signing or expressing their agreement in principle. The direction taken by several higher education reforms launched in the meantime in Europe has proved many Governments'determination to act. European higher education institutions, for their part, have accepted the challenge and taken up a main role in constructing the European area of higher education, also in the wake of the fundamental principles laid down in the Magna Charta Universitatum of 1988. This is of the highest importance, given that Universities'independence and autonomy ensure that higher education and research systems continuously adapt to changing needs, society's demands and advances in scientific knowledge.

The course has been set in the right direction and with meaningful purpose. The achievement of greater compatibility an comparability of the systems of higher education nevertheless requires continual momentum in order to be fully accomplished. We need to support it

through promoting concrete measures to achieve tangible forward steps. The 18th June meeting saw participation by authoritative experts and scholars from all countries and provides us with very useful suggestions on the initiatives to be taken.

We must in particular look at the objective of increasing the international competitiveness of the European system of higher education. The vitality and efficiency of any civilisation can be measured by the appeal that its culture has for other countries. We need to ensure that the European higher education system acquires a world-wide degree of attraction equal to our extraordinary cultural and scientific traditions.

While affirming our support to the general principles laid down in the Sorbonne Declaration, we engage in co-ordinating our policies to reach in the short term, and in the short term and in any case within the first decade of the new millennium, the following objectives, which we consider to be of primary relevance in order to establish the European area of higher education and to promote the European system of higher education world-wide

Adoption of a system of easily readable and comparable degrees, also through the implementation of the Diploma Supplement, in order to European citizens'employability and the international competitiveness of the European higher education system.

Adoption of a system essentially based on two main cycles, undergraduate and postgraduate. Access to the second cycle shall require successful completion of first cycle studies, lasting a minimum of three years. The degree awarded after the first cycle shall also be relevant to the European labour market as an appropriate level of qualification. The second cycle should lead to the master and/or doctorat degree as in many European countries.

Establishment of a system of credits - such as the ECTS system - as a proper means of promoting the most widespread student mobility. Credits could also be acquired in non-higher education contexts, including lifelong learning, provided they are recognised by receiving Universities concerned.

Promotion of mobility by overcoming obstacles to the effective exercise of free movement with particular attention to:

- for students, access to study and training opportunities and to related services.

- for teachers, researchers and administrative staff, recognition and valorisation of periods spent in a European context researching, teaching and training, without prejudicing their statutory rights.

Promotion of European co-operation in quality assurance with a view to develop comparable criteria and methodologies Promotion of necessary European dimensions in higher education, particularly with regards to curricular development, inter-institutional co-operation, mobility schemes and integrated programmes of study, training and research.

We hereby undertake to attain these objectives - within the framework of our institutional

competences and taking full respect of the diversity of cultures, languages, national education systems and of d University autonomy - to consolidate the European area of higher education. To that end, we will pursue the ways of intergovernmental co-operation, together with those of non governmental European organisations with competences on higher education. We expect universities to again respond promptly and positively and to contribute actively to the success of our endeavour.

Convinced that the establishment of the European area of higher education requires constant support, supervision and adaptation to the continuously evolving needs, we decide to meet again within two years in order to assess the progress achieved and the new steps to be taken.

Annex III:
The Lisbon Convention of the Council of Europe

COUNCIL OF EUROPE CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

European Treaty Series - No. 165

CONVENTION ON THE RECOGNITION OF QUALIFICATIONS CONCERNING HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE EUROPEAN REGION

Lisbon, 11.IV.1997

The Parties to this Convention,(PRIVATE)

Conscious of the fact that the right to education is a human right, and that higher education, which is instrumental in the pursuit and advancement of knowledge, constitutes an exceptionally rich cultural and scientific asset for both individuals and society;

Considering that higher education should play a vital role in promoting peace, mutual understanding and tolerance, and in creating mutual confidence among peoples and nations;

Considering that the great diversity of education systems in the European region reflects its cultural, social, political, philosophical, religious and economic diversity, an exceptional asset which should be fully respected;

Desiring to enable all people of the region to benefit fully from this rich asset of diversity by facilitating access by the inhabitants of each State and by the students of each Party's educational institutions to the educational resources of the other Parties, more specifically by facilitating their efforts to continue their education or to complete a period of studies in higher education institutions in those other Parties;

Considering that the recognition of studies, certificates, diplomas and degrees obtained in another country of the European region represents an important measure for promoting academic mobility between the Parties;

Attaching great importance to the principle of institutional autonomy, and conscious of the need to uphold and protect this principle;

Convinced that a fair recognition of qualifications is a key element of the right to education and a responsibility of society;

Having regard to the Council of Europe and UNESCO Conventions covering academic recognition in Europe:

European Convention on the Equivalence of Diplomas leading to Admission to Universities (1953, ETS No. 15), and its Protocol (1964, ETS No. 49);

European Convention on the Equivalence of Periods of University Study (1956, ETS No. 21);

European Convention on the Academic Recognition of University Qualifications (1959, ETS No. 32);

Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees concerning Higher Education in the States belonging to the Europe Region (1979);

European Convention on the General Equivalence of Periods of University Study (1990, ETS No. 138);

Having regard also to the International Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education in the Arab and European States bordering on the Mediterranean (1976), adopted within the framework of UNESCO and partially covering academic recognition in Europe;

Mindful that this Convention should also be considered in the context of the UNESCO conventions and the International Recommendation covering other Regions of the world, and of the need for an improved exchange of information between these Regions;

Conscious of the wide ranging changes in higher education in the European region since these Conventions were adopted, resulting in considerably increased diversification within and between national higher education systems, and of the need to adapt the legal instruments and practice to reflect these developments;

Conscious of the need to find common solutions to practical recognition problems in the European region;

Conscious of the need to improve current recognition practice and to make it more transparent and better adapted to the current situation of higher education in the European region;

Confident of the positive significance of a Convention elaborated and adopted under the joint auspices of the Council of Europe and UNESCO providing a framework for the further development of recognition practices in the European region;

Conscious of the importance of providing permanent implementation mechanisms in order to put the principles and provisions of the current Convention into practice,

Have agreed as follows:

Section I. Definitions

Article I

For the purposes of this Convention, the following terms shall have the following meaning:

Access (to higher education)

The right of qualified candidates to apply and to be considered for admission to higher education.

Admission (to higher education institutions and programmes)

The act of, or system for, allowing qualified applicants to pursue studies in higher education at a given institution and/or a given programme.

Assessment (of institutions or programmes)

The process for establishing the educational quality of a higher education institution or programme.

Assessment (of individual qualifications)

The written appraisal or evaluation of an individual's foreign qualifications by a competent body.

Competent recognition authority

A body officially charged with making binding decisions on the recognition of foreign qualifications.

Higher education

All types of courses of study, or sets of courses of study, training or training for research at the post secondary level which are recognized by the relevant authorities of a Party as belonging to its higher education system.

Higher education institution

An establishment providing higher education and recognized by the competent authority of a Party as belonging to its system of higher education.

Higher education programme

A course of study recognized by the competent authority of a Party as belonging to its system of higher education, and the completion of which provides the student with a higher education qualification.

Period of study

Any component of a higher education programme which has been evaluated and documented and, while not a complete programme of study in itself, represents a significant acquisition of knowledge or skill.

Qualification

A. Higher education qualification

Any degree, diploma or other certificate issued by a competent authority attesting the successful completion of a higher education programme.

B. Qualification giving access to higher education

Any diploma or other certificate issued by a competent authority attesting the successful completion of an education programme and giving the holder of the qualification the right to be considered for admission to higher education (cf. the definition of access).

Recognition

A formal acknowledgement by a competent authority of the value of a foreign educational qualification with a view to access to educational and/or employment activities.

Requirement

A. General requirements

Conditions that must in all cases be fulfilled for access to higher education, or to a given level thereof, or for the award of a higher education qualification at a given level.

B. Specific requirements

Conditions that must be fulfilled, in addition to the general requirements, in order to gain admission to a particular higher education programme, or for the award of a specific higher education qualification in a particular field of study.

Section II. The competence of authorities

Article II.1

1 Where central authorities of a Party are competent to make decisions in recognition cases, that Party shall be immediately bound by the provisions of this Convention and shall take the necessary measures to ensure the implementation of its provisions on its territory.

Where the competence to make decisions in recognition matters lies with components of the Party, the Party shall furnish one of the depositaries with a brief statement of its constitutional situation or structure at the time of signature or when depositing its instrument of ratification, acceptance, approval or accession, or any time thereafter. In such cases, the competent authorities of the components of the Parties so designated shall take the necessary measures to ensure implementation of the provisions of this Convention on their territory.

2 Where the competence to make decisions in recognition matters lies with individual higher education institutions or other entities, each Party according to its constitutional situation or structure shall transmit the text of this convention to these institutions or entities and shall take all possible steps to encourage the favourable consideration and application of its provisions.

3 The provisions of paragraphs 1 and 2 of this Article shall apply, *mutatis mutandis*, to the obligations of the Parties under subsequent articles of this Convention.

Article II.2

At the time of signature or when depositing its instrument of ratification, acceptance, approval or accession, or at any time thereafter, each State, the Holy See or the European Community shall inform either depositary of the present Convention of the authorities which are competent to make different categories of decisions in recognition cases.

Article II.3

Nothing in this Convention shall be deemed to derogate from any more favourable provisions concerning the recognition of qualifications issued in one of the Parties contained in or stemming from an existing or a future treaty to which a Party to this Convention may be or may become a party.

Section III. Basic principles related to the assessment of qualifications

Article III.1

1 Holders of qualifications issued in one of the Parties shall have adequate access, upon request to the appropriate body, to an assessment of these qualifications.

2 No discrimination shall be made in this respect on any ground such as the applicant's gender, race, colour, disability, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, association with a national minority, property, birth or other status, or on the grounds of any other circumstance not related to the merits of the qualification for which recognition is sought. In order to assure this right, each Party undertakes to make appropriate arrangements for the assessment of an application for recognition of qualifications solely on the basis of the knowledge and skills achieved.

Article III.2

Each Party shall ensure that the procedures and criteria used in the assessment and recognition of qualifications are transparent, coherent and reliable.

Article III.3

1 Decisions on recognition shall be made on the basis of appropriate information on the qualifications for which recognition is sought.

2 In the first instance, the responsibility for providing adequate information rests with the applicant, who shall provide such information in good faith.

3 Notwithstanding the responsibility of the applicant, the institutions having issued the qualifications in question shall have a duty to provide, upon request of the applicant and within reasonable limits, relevant information to the holder of the qualification, to the institution, or to the competent authorities of the country in which recognition is sought.

4 The Parties shall instruct or encourage, as appropriate, all education institutions belonging to their education systems to comply with any reasonable request for information for the purpose of assessing qualifications earned at the said institutions.

5 The responsibility to demonstrate that an application does not fulfil the relevant requirements lies with the body undertaking the assessment.

Article III.4

Each Party shall ensure, in order to facilitate the recognition of qualifications, that adequate and clear information on its education system is provided.

Article III.5

Decisions on recognition shall be made within a reasonable time limit specified beforehand by the competent recognition authority and calculated from the time all necessary information in the case has been provided. If recognition is withheld, the reasons for the refusal to grant recognition shall be stated, and information shall be given concerning possible measures the applicant may take in order to obtain recognition at a later stage. If recognition is withheld, or if no decision is taken, the applicant shall be able to make an appeal within a reasonable time limit.

Section IV. Recognition of qualifications giving access to higher education

Article IV.1

Each Party shall recognize the qualifications issued by other Parties meeting the general requirements for access to higher education in those Parties for the purpose of access to programmes belonging to its higher education system, unless a substantial difference can be shown between the general requirements for access in the Party in which the qualification was obtained and in the Party in which recognition of the qualification is sought.

Article IV.2

Alternatively, it shall be sufficient for a Party to enable the holder of a qualification issued in one of the other Parties to obtain an assessment of that qualification, upon request by the holder, and the provisions of Article IV.1 shall apply *mutatis mutandis* to such a case.

Article IV.3

Where a qualification gives access only to specific types of institutions or programmes of higher education in the Party in which the qualification was obtained, each other Party shall grant holders of such qualifications access to similar specific programmes in institutions belonging to its higher education system, unless a substantial difference can be demonstrated between the requirements for access in the Party in which the qualification was obtained and the Party in which recognition of the qualification is sought.

Article IV.4

Where admission to particular higher education programmes is dependent on the fulfilment of specific requirements in addition to the general requirements for access, the competent authorities of the Party concerned may impose the additional requirements equally on holders of qualifications obtained in the other Parties or assess whether applicants with qualifications obtained in other Parties fulfil equivalent requirements.

Article IV.5

Where, in the Party in which they have been obtained, school leaving certificates give access to higher education only in combination with additional qualifying examinations as a prerequisite for access, the other Parties may make access conditional on these requirements or offer an alternative for satisfying such additional requirements within their own educational systems. Any State, the Holy See or the European Community may, at the time of signature or when depositing its instrument of ratification, acceptance, approval or accession, or at any time thereafter, notify one of the depositaries that it avails itself of the provisions of this Article, specifying the Parties in regard to which it intends to apply this Article as well as the reasons therefor.

Article IV.6

Without prejudice to the provisions of Articles IV.1, IV.2, IV.3, IV.4 and IV.5, admission to a given higher education institution, or to a given programme within such an institution, may be restricted or selective. In cases in which admission to a higher education institution and/or programme is selective, admission procedures should be designed with a view to ensuring that the assessment of foreign qualifications is carried out according to the principles of fairness and non-discrimination described in Section III.

Article IV.7

Without prejudice to the provisions of Articles IV.1, IV.2, IV.3, IV.4 and IV.5, admission to a given higher education institution may be made conditional on demonstration by the applicant of sufficient competence in the language or languages of instruction of the institution concerned, or in other specified languages.

Article IV.8

In the Parties in which access to higher education may be obtained on the basis of non-traditional qualifications, similar qualifications obtained in other Parties shall be assessed in a similar manner as non-traditional qualifications earned in the Party in which recognition is sought.

Article IV.9

For the purpose of admission to programmes of higher education, each Party may make the recognition of qualifications issued by foreign educational institutions operating in its territory contingent upon specific requirements of national legislation or specific agreements concluded with the Party of origin of such institutions.

Section V. Recognition of periods of study

Article V.1

Each Party shall recognize periods of study completed within the framework of a higher education programme in another Party. This recognition shall comprise such periods of study towards the completion of a higher education programme in the Party in which recognition is sought, unless substantial differences can be shown between the periods of study completed in another Party and the part of the higher education programme which they would replace in the Party in which recognition is sought.

Article V.2

Alternatively, it shall be sufficient for a Party to enable a person who has completed a period of study within the framework of a higher education programme in another Party to obtain an assessment of that period of study, upon request by the person concerned, and the provisions of Article V.1 shall apply *mutatis mutandis* to such a case.

Article V.3

In particular, each Party shall facilitate recognition of periods of study when:

a there has been a previous agreement between, on the one hand, the higher education institution or the competent authority responsible for the relevant period of study and, on the other hand, the higher education institution or the competent recognition authority responsible for the recognition that is sought; and

b the higher education institution in which the period of study has been completed has issued a certificate or transcript of academic records attesting that the student has successfully completed the stipulated requirements for the said period of study.

Section VI. Recognition of higher education qualifications

Article VI.1

To the extent that a recognition decision is based on the knowledge and skills certified by the higher education qualification, each Party shall recognize the higher education qualifications conferred in another Party, unless a substantial difference can be shown between the qualification for which recognition is sought and the corresponding qualification in the Party in which recognition is sought.

Article VI.2

Alternatively, it shall be sufficient for a Party to enable the holder of a higher education qualification issued in one of the other Parties to obtain an assessment of that qualification, upon request by the holder, and the provisions of Article VI.1 shall apply *mutatis mutandis* to such a case.

Article VI.3

Recognition in a Party of a higher education qualification issued in another Party shall have one or both of the following consequences:

a access to further higher education studies, including relevant examinations, and/or to preparations for the doctorate, on the same conditions as those applicable to holders of qualifications of the Party in which recognition is sought;

b the use of an academic title, subject to the laws and regulations of the Party or a jurisdiction thereof, in which recognition is sought.

In addition, recognition may facilitate access to the labour market subject to laws and regulations of the Party, or a jurisdiction thereof, in which recognition is sought.

Article VI.4

An assessment in a Party of a higher education qualification issued in another Party may take the form of:

a advice for general employment purposes;

b advice to an educational institution for the purpose of admission into its programmes;

c advice to any other competent recognition authority.

Article VI.5

Each Party may make the recognition of higher education qualifications issued by foreign educational institutions operating in its territory contingent upon specific requirements of national legislation or specific agreements concluded with the Party of origin of such institutions.

Section VII. Recognition of qualifications held by refugees, displaced persons and persons in a refugee-like situation

Article VII

Each Party shall take all feasible and reasonable steps within the framework of its education system and in conformity with its constitutional, legal, and regulatory provisions to develop procedures designed to assess fairly and expeditiously whether refugees, displaced persons and persons in a refugee-like situation fulfil the relevant requirements for access to higher education, to further higher education programmes or to employment activities, even in cases in which the qualifications obtained in one of the Parties cannot be proven through documentary evidence.

Section VIII. Information on the assessment of higher education institutions and programmes

Article VIII.1

Each Party shall provide adequate information on any institution belonging to its higher education system, and on any programme operated by these institutions, with a view to enabling the competent authorities of other Parties to ascertain whether the quality of the qualifications issued by these institutions justifies recognition in the Party in which recognition is sought. Such information shall take the following form:

a in the case of Parties having established a system of formal assessment of higher education institutions and programmes: information on the methods and results of this assessment, and of the standards of quality specific to each type of higher education institution granting, and to programmes leading to, higher education qualifications;

b in the case of Parties which have not established a system of formal assessment of higher education institutions and programmes: information on the recognition of the various qualifications obtained at any higher education institution, or within any higher education programme, belonging to their higher education systems.

Article VIII.2

Each Party shall make adequate provisions for the development, maintenance and provision of:

a an overview of the different types of higher education institutions belonging to its higher education system, with the typical characteristics of each type of institution;

b a list of recognized institutions (public and private) belonging to its higher education system, indicating their powers to award different types of qualifications and the requirements for gaining access to each type of institution and programme;

c a description of higher education programmes;

d a list of educational institutions located outside its territory which the Party considers as belonging to its education system.

Section IX. Information on recognition matters

Article IX.1

In order to facilitate the recognition of qualifications concerning higher education, the Parties undertake to establish transparent systems for the complete description of the qualifications obtained.

Article IX.2

1 Acknowledging the need for relevant, accurate and up-to-date information, each Party shall establish or maintain a national information centre and shall notify one of the depositaries of its establishment, or of any changes affecting it.

2 In each Party, the national information centre shall:

a facilitate access to authoritative and accurate information on the higher education system and qualifications of the country in which it is located;

b facilitate access to information on the higher education systems and qualifications of the other Parties;

c give advice or information on recognition matters and assessment of qualifications, in accordance with national laws and regulations.

3 Every national information centre shall have at its disposal the necessary means to enable it to fulfil its functions.

Article IX.3

The Parties shall promote, through the national information centres or otherwise, the use of the UNESCO/Council of Europe Diploma Supplement or any other comparable document by the higher education institutions of the Parties.

Section X. Implementation mechanisms

Article X.1

The following bodies shall oversee, promote and facilitate the implementation of the Convention:

a the Committee of the Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region;

b the European Network of National Information Centres on academic mobility and recognition (the ENIC Network), established by decision of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on 9 June 1994 and the UNESCO Regional Committee for Europe on 18 June 1994.

Article X.2

1 The Committee of the Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region (hereafter referred to as "the Committee") is hereby established. It shall be composed of one representative of each Party.

2 For the purposes of Article X.2, the term "Party" shall not apply to the European Community.

3 The States mentioned in Article XI.1.1 and the Holy See, if they are not Parties to this Convention, the European Community and the President of the ENIC Network may participate in the meetings of the Committee as observers. Representatives of governmental and non-governmental organizations active in the field of recognition in the Region may also be invited to attend meetings of the Committee as observers.

4 The President of the UNESCO Regional Committee for the Application of the Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees concerning Higher Education in the States belonging to the Europe Region shall also be invited to participate in the meetings of the Committee as an observer.

5 The Committee shall promote the application of this Convention and shall oversee its implementation. To this end it may adopt, by a majority of the Parties, recommendations, declarations, protocols and models of good practice to guide the competent authorities of the Parties in their implementation of the Convention and in their consideration of applications for the recognition of higher education qualifications. While they shall not be bound by such texts, the Parties shall use their best endeavours to apply them, to bring the texts to the attention of the competent authorities and to encourage their application. The Committee shall seek the opinion of the ENIC Network before making its decisions.

6 The Committee shall report to the relevant bodies of the Council of Europe and UNESCO.

7 The Committee shall maintain links to the UNESCO Regional Committees for the Application of Conventions on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education adopted under the auspices of UNESCO.

8 A majority of the Parties shall constitute a quorum.

9 The Committee shall adopt its Rules of Procedure. It shall meet in ordinary session at least every three years. The Committee shall meet for the first time within a year of the entry into force of this Convention.

10 The Secretariat of the Committee shall be entrusted jointly to the Secretary General of the Council of Europe and to the Director-General of UNESCO.

Article X.3

1 Each Party shall appoint as a member of the European network of national information centres on academic mobility and recognition (the ENIC Network) the national information centre established or maintained under Article IX.2. In cases in which more than one national information centre is established or maintained in a Party under Article IX.2, all these shall be members of the Network, but the national information centres concerned shall dispose of only one vote.

2 The ENIC Network shall, in its composition restricted to national information centres of the Parties to this Convention, uphold and assist the practical implementation of the Convention by the competent national authorities. The Network shall meet at least once a year in plenary session. It shall elect its President and Bureau in accordance with its terms of reference.

3 The Secretariat of the ENIC Network shall be entrusted jointly to the Secretary General of the Council of Europe and to the Director-General of UNESCO.

4 The Parties shall cooperate, through the ENIC Network, with the national information centres of other Parties, especially by enabling them to collect all information of use to the national information centres in their activities relating to academic recognition and mobility.

Section XI. Final clauses

Article XI.1

1 This Convention shall be open for signature by:

a the member States of the Council of Europe;

b the member States of the UNESCO Europe Region;

c any other signatory, contracting State or party to the European Cultural Convention of the Council of Europe and/or to the UNESCO Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees concerning Higher Education in the States belonging to the Europe Region,

which have been invited to the Diplomatic Conference entrusted with the adoption of this Convention.

2 These States and the Holy See may express their consent to be bound by:

a signature without reservation as to ratification, acceptance or approval; or

b signature, subject to ratification, acceptance or approval, followed by ratification, acceptance or approval; or

c accession.

3 Signatures shall be made with one of the depositaries. Instruments of ratification, acceptance, approval or accession shall be deposited with one of the depositaries.

Article XI.2

This Convention shall enter into force on the first day of the month following the expiration of the period of one month after five States, including at least three member States of the Council of Europe and/or the UNESCO Europe Region, have expressed their consent to be bound by the Convention. It shall enter into force for each other State on the first day of the month following the expiration of the period of one month after the date of expression of its consent to be bound by the Convention.

Article XI.3

1 After the entry into force of this Convention, any State other than those falling into one of the categories listed under Article XI.1 may request accession to this Convention. Any request to this effect shall be addressed to one of the depositaries, who shall transmit it to the Parties at least three months before the meeting of the Committee of the Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region. The depositary shall also inform the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe and the Executive Board of UNESCO.

2 The decision to invite a State which so requests to accede to this Convention shall be taken by a two-thirds majority of the Parties.

3 After the entry into force of this Convention the European Community may accede to it following a request by its member States, which shall be addressed to one of the depositaries. In this case, Article XI.3.2 shall not apply.

4 In respect of any acceding States or the European Community, the Convention shall enter into force on the first day of the month following the expiration of the period of one month after the deposit of the instrument of accession with one of the depositaries.

Article XI.4

1 Parties to this Convention which are at the same time parties to one or more of the following Conventions:

European Convention on the Equivalence of Diplomas leading to Admission to Universities (1953, ETS No. 15), and its Protocol (1964, ETS No. 49);

European Convention on the Equivalence of Periods of University Study (1956, ETS No. 21);

European Convention on the Academic Recognition of University Qualifications (1959, ETS No. 32);

International Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Dipomas and Degrees in Higher Education in the Arab and European States bordering on the Mediterranean (1976);

Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees concerning Higher Education in the States belonging to the Europe Region (1979);

European Convention on the General Equivalence of Periods of University Study (1990, ETS No. 138),

a shall apply the provisions of the present Convention in their mutual relations;

b shall continue to apply the above mentioned Conventions to which they are a party in their relations with other States party to those Conventions but not to the present Convention.

2 The Parties to this Convention undertake to abstain from becoming a party to any of the Conventions mentioned in paragraph 1, to which they are not already a party, with the exception of the International Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education in the Arab and European States bordering on the Mediterranean.

Article XI.5

1 Any State may, at the time of signature or when depositing its instrument of ratification, acceptance, approval or accession, specify the territory or territories to which this Convention shall apply.

2 Any State may, at any later date, by a declaration addressed to one of the depositaries, extend the application of this Convention to any other territory specified in the declaration. In respect of such territory the Convention shall enter into force on the first day of the month following the expiration of a period of one month after the date of receipt of such declaration by the depositary.

3 Any declaration made under the two preceding paragraphs may, in respect of any territory specified in such declaration, be withdrawn by a notification addressed to one of the depositaries. The withdrawal shall become effective on the first day of the month following the expiration of a period of one month after the date of receipt of such notification by the depositary.

Article XI.6

1 Any Party may, at any time, denounce this Convention by means of a notification addressed to one of the depositaries.

2 Such denunciation shall become effective on the first day of the month following the expiration of a period of twelve months after the date of receipt of the notification by the depositary. However, such denunciation shall not affect recognition decisions taken previously under the provisions of this Convention.

3 Termination or suspension of the operation of this Convention as a consequence of a violation by a Party of a provision essential to the accomplishment of the object or purpose of this Convention shall be addressed in accordance with international law.

Article XI.7

1 Any State, the Holy See or the European Community may, at the time of signature or when depositing its instrument of ratification, acceptance, approval or accession, declare that it reserves the right not to apply, in whole or in part, one or more of the following Articles of this Convention:

Article IV.8
Article V.3
Article VI.3
Article VIII.2
Article IX.3

No other reservation may be made.

2 Any Party which has made a reservation under the preceding paragraph may wholly or partly withdraw it by means of a notification addressed to one of the depositaries. The withdrawal shall take effect on the date of receipt of such notification by the depositary.

3 A Party which has made a reservation in respect of a provision of this Convention may not claim the application of that provision by any other Party; it may, however, if its reservation is partial or conditional, claim the application of that provision in so far as it has itself accepted it.

Article XI.8

1 Draft amendments to this Convention may be adopted by the Committee of the Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region by a two-thirds majority of the Parties. Any draft amendment so adopted shall be incorporated into a Protocol to this Convention. The Protocol shall specify the modalities for its entry into force which, in any event, shall require the expression of consent by the Parties to be bound by it.

2 No amendment may be made to Section III of this Convention under the procedure of paragraph 1 above.

3 Any proposal for amendments shall be communicated to one of the depositaries, who shall transmit it to the Parties at least three months before the meeting of the Committee. The depositary shall also inform the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe and the Executive Board of UNESCO.

Article XI.9

1 The Secretary General of the Council of Europe and the Director-General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization shall be the depositaries of this Convention.

2 The depositary with whom an act, notification or communication has been deposited shall notify the Parties to this Convention, as well as the other member States of the Council of Europe and/or of the UNESCO Europe Region of:

a any signature;

b the deposit of any instrument of ratification, acceptance, approval or accession;

c any date of entry into force of this Convention in accordance with the provisions of Articles XI.2 and XI.3.4;

d any reservation made in pursuance of the provisions of Article XI.7 and the withdrawal of any reservations made in pursuance of the provisions of Article XI.7;

e any denunciation of this Convention in pursuance of Article XI.6;

f any declarations made in accordance with the provisions of Article II.1, or of Article II.2;

g any declarations made in accordance with the provisions of Article IV.5;

h any request for accession made in accordance with the provisions of Article XI.3;

i any proposal made in accordance with the provisions of Article XI.8;

j any other act, notification or communication relating to this Convention.

3 The depositary receiving a communication or making a notification in pursuance of the provisions of this Convention shall immediately inform the other depositary thereof.

In witness thereof the undersigned representatives, being duly authorized, have signed this Convention.

Done at Lisbon on 11 April 1997, in the English, French, Russian and Spanish languages, the four texts being equally authoritative, in two copies, one of which shall be deposited in the archives of the Council of Europe and the other in the archives of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. A certified copy shall be sent to all the States referred to in Article XI.1, to the Holy See and to the European Community and to the Secretariat of the United Nations.

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